

"As their horses subsist during winter on the grass which they find under the snow, the Jakuti migrate in spring with their herds, in order to leave the pas-[168]ture in the neighbourhood of their winter-dwellings undisturbed. The number of horned cattle they can keep depends on the quantity of winter-forage which they are able to obtain, and nothing can exceed the industry with which they pursue this most important object during the short summer. Throughout the whole of the hay-making season they live almost entirely on kumyss, of which they drink great quantities. It agrees with them remarkably well, and they grow fat and strong with scarcely any other food. One of the greatest disasters which can befall them is a sudden and early winter, cutting short the hay-harvest. Such was the case the present year. A keen wind from the northwest set in on the 22nd of August, with a heavy fall of snow, which covered all the hay remaining in the meadows; and as only part of it had been stacked, the loss was very great. It was followed by such severe cold that the lakes froze, and troops of wolves came out of the forest and carried off above eighty cows. At the same time, the Kolyma was so unusually swollen that the fishery in a great measure failed. A winter of scarcity, therefore, seemed inevitable; but nothing appeared to distress the herdsmen so much as being obliged, on account of their insufficient store of hay, to diminish still farther the number of their cattle, so many of which they had already lost by the ravages of the wolves."

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484 of the great dangers of the trip, but now he was considering it again, for he rightly assumed that in the course of the years a great deal of fossil ivory must have been washed out there again. He also expressed to us his willingness, in case the Imperial Geographical Society planned a journey of exploration to those islands, to support it whole-heartedly and perhaps even accompany it himself, but in any case he would furnish dogs and guides.

122 After we crossed the Aldán, which has quite low banks here, quite late in the evening because of the stop, we reached the station after two more versts, from which we could not depart until after noon on the next day because we had to give our reindeer a rest. In spite of this they were so exhausted that the Jakuten /Yakut/ had to walk alongside during the whole trip, and only with difficulty by means of a six-hour journey were we able to drag ourselves to the next station, Katyngnátskije, scarcely 30 versts away. It was certainly not a brilliant conclusion to our long reindeer journey. From here on to Jakutsk /Yakutsk/ we were to be transported by horses, but great difficulties arose as a result of the lack of suitable vehicles, for here for the most part one only travels by riding. After long deliberation the Jakuten /Yakut/ finally agreed to hitch a horse in front of each narte, and thus on December 7 at about 9:00 in the morning we were able to set out again. The horses took us on somewhat faster than the exhausted reindeer, but that did not help us much. Obviously the post arrangements were still in their infancy here, but that was the least of it -- in an emergency help could have been requested from the governor through a messenger, for we were still only about 150 versts from Jakutsk -- the specter of a terrible /241/ smallpox epidemic loomed before us. Dark rumors about it had already reached us -- they still fell short of the reality. Everywhere along our way and in almost all the stations the stricken and dead were said to be lying about, but we nevertheless had to go in, because a journey with the mercury frozen is impossible, in spite of the warmest clothing, without occasionally getting warm.

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At the very next station, Toraískij, which we reached at 1:00 in the afternoon, we were obliged to halt. The manageress complained to us that her husband had left the day before to get horses, and she was very afraid that since he had been gone so long he had fallen ill with smallpox. Unfortunately here, too, our Cossack proved utterly useless. Even though the Cossack's uniform is generally greatly respected, our unfortunate companion never succeeded in arousing anything but laughter whenever he was supposed to show his authority, because he could not hide his ineptitude. We had sent him ahead with an interpreter and our papers to the next station, Karagát-erdün, where a Jakut /Yakut/ authority -- the Borogónskaja upráwa /uprava/ -- was to be found, in order to have horses sent from there, but he did not come back at all, and we therefore started out the next morning without him, since we had succeeded in rounding up a few horses. We met him on the way -- he brought the almost self-evident news that he had accomplished nothing. From this station on our journey finally proceeded without any particular obstacles. At every station, to be sure, we heard about the smallpox and the sick, who were said to be present in the closest proximity, but we did not see any. All the conditions for a rapid spread of the epidemic through contagion certainly existed in the frightfully stuffy air of the yurts, filled with mephitic vapors. Since the /242/ livestock is very often found in the same rooms in which people are quartered, the air is so poisoned that anyone entering from the pure winter air actually loses his breath, and he needs some time to become accustomed to it. I remember when I once entered a station and, half stupified by this atmosphere and with my glasses badly dimmed, abruptly collided with a post nag, which seemed very much surprised that I begrudged him his favorite place near the fireplace.

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At the following stations of Jeljejnjátskie, Kamesták, and Makárinkij, we stopped for only a short time, an hour at most, and traveled through the night, thus reaching the last station before Jakutsk -- Karjalákskij -- at 2:00 on the afternoon of December 9. From here we first of all dispatched the Cossack